

freedom. I am glad there are people like Private First Class Menchaca, who was happy to serve his country, not knowing perhaps that that service to his country would end in the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of freedom.

Mr. President, I have been listening to the debate so far on the amendments on the floor. I cannot help but be struck by those who would cast the only options available to America, when it comes to what is now the central front in the global war on terror in Iraq, as open-ended, unconditional commitment versus arbitrary deadlines. We have more choices than that, and it is indeed the policy of our Government at the present time not to offer open-ended, unconditional commitments, or to set arbitrary deadlines that serve as an encouragement to the enemy, knowing that if they hunker down long enough and wait us out long enough, the American people will lose their resolve and simply give up.

Mr. President, our policy is one based on conditions on the ground, and based on the sound advice of our professional military experts, people such as GEN John Abizaid, head of Central Command, and General Casey, head of the coalition forces in Iraq. These are the professional generals—those with knowledge of the facts on the ground—who are making the judgments and recommendations to the President and the Secretary of Defense and to this Congress about what our policy should be, and that policy is based on conditions on the ground.

Those who suggest that our only choice is between open-ended, unconditional commitments and arbitrary deadlines are presenting us with a false choice, one that, in the end, simply looks a lot like giving up. I speak in opposition to any proposal to impose an arbitrary deadline for the removal of our troops from Iraq and to speak about what I believe and know others of my colleagues believe is our need to win the war on terror and, while doing so, to stand beside the Iraqi people as they work to build their fledgling democracy and work to expand their growing ability to secure themselves.

The fundamental question we have before us today is: Are we going to base our military strategy in Iraq on an arbitrary timetable for withdrawal based upon defeatism, a policy of retreat, a policy of appeasement, a policy of surrender, or are we going to rely upon the military judgment of those who are currently leading us to victory in Iraq?

It is clear, as in all wars, that our Nation is being tested. This is not so much a test for our professional military, which is the preeminent fighting force in the world today and no doubt the premier fighting force that the world has ever known—there is no military force that can defeat the United States of America—the only thing that can defeat the United States of America, when it comes to the global war on terror, is America itself, if we lose the courage of our convictions, if we simply give up.

On October 11, 2002, 77 Members of this body voted to authorize the use of force to remove Saddam Hussein in Iraq. I will be interested to see, when we vote on these various amendments, how many of our colleagues have simply lost the courage or conviction they displayed then, in saying it was important to remove a terrible, bloodthirsty tyrant from Iraq. I have stood on the mass burial grave sites in Iraq where at least 400,000 Iraqis lie who were victims of that bloodthirsty dictator.

We know that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was in Iraq more than a year before American forces went in. We all know that Saddam Hussein, with his fantasies of developing weapons of mass destruction, teamed up with terrorists and presented a clear and imminent threat to the safety and security of the United States.

We have much unfinished work to do. But we must not forget to honor the sacrifices of those 2,500 people, like Private First Class Menchaca of Texas, who have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. Are we going to tell those brave patriots and their families that they have sacrificed in vain, that we were not really serious about our commitments both to the American people, to preserve their safety and security, as well as to our allies, the Iraqi people? I hope not.

There is no victory in arbitrary withdrawal from Iraq, and victory must remain our sole resolve. Any suggestion that a withdrawal from Iraq would somehow accelerate or pressure the Iraqi Government, and Iraqis themselves, into supporting democracy more fervently is simply inconsistent with the facts. The people who are probably most anxious for the American and coalition forces to leave Iraq—second only to the American people's desire to have their sons and daughters come home—the people most eager to see them come home, beyond their family members, are probably the Iraqi people themselves. But they understand that they are not yet prepared to defend themselves against the terrorists, against the insurgents, against the sectarian strife that is currently racking that country. Yet we find that the armchair generals in Washington, DC, are hardly in a position to determine the best military strategy. How could it be any other way? Who is in a better position to determine what that strategy should be, based on conditions on the ground, than those professional military men and women who study this issue daily, who live with it daily, and who have tremendous experience? Surely, they have a better idea about how we can win the war in Iraq than the armchair generals in Washington who are resigned to defeat and simply giving up.

The Senator from New York quoted from a Washington Post article of yesterday and suggested that the National Security Adviser in Iraq had somehow endorsed the provisions of the Levin amendment. But I want to quote one

sentence that clearly refutes that suggestion. The National Security Adviser said:

This roadmap on foreign troop withdrawals is based not just on a series of dates but, most important, on achievement of set objectives for restoring security in Iraq.

In other words, Iraq's National Security Adviser understands the foolishness of setting arbitrary deadlines that have no relationship to achievement of set objectives for restoring security in Iraq. Do we all wish that our troops could come home sooner rather than later? Of course we do. But it is simply foolishness and folly to impose an arbitrary timetable on our forces, requiring them to withdraw from Iraq before the job is done and while the going gets tough.

I have in my hands a report from the U.S. Department of State that is 19 pages long. Anybody with access to the Internet could copy this or view it online. It is called "Significant Terrorist Incidents, 1961 to 2003; A Brief Chronology." It is 19 pages long. I ask our colleagues who counsel retreat, who counsel self-defeatism, what do they think is going to happen if we leave Iraq prematurely, before the Iraqi security forces can defend themselves in that new democracy? What do they expect will happen? I think what we know will happen is that power void would be filled by those who are currently fighting and killing innocent people in Iraq and who, given the opportunity, would use that failed state, if we were to retreat prematurely, as a platform to plot, plan, finance, and export terrorist acts to the United States and elsewhere around the world.

It is pure folly to think that the terrorists somehow would simply give up if we decided to come home prematurely, or that Iraq could stand on its own to fight and defend itself and have any chance of nursing this fledgling democracy into full maturity.

Just yesterday I heard some of the Members on the other side of the aisle say that they, too, thought that troop withdrawal should be based upon the judgment of military commanders. But they added: As long as the generals agree with them, that withdrawal will take place within 6 months.

Another one of our colleagues who has a resolution that has been much discussed announced he would extend his initial proposal of a 6-month deadline to a 1-year deadline. I wonder what sort of wisdom he acquired over the course of a weekend that told him, no, the arbitrary deadline should not be 6 months but should now be a year. What sort of new information did he acquire that led him to the conclusion that a withdrawal in 1 year was better than a withdrawal 6 months from now?

It is clear that such arbitrary decisions have no basis in military strategy. According to one news story last week, there were colleagues of ours on the other side of the aisle who were up all hours searching for a troop withdrawal position on the war on terror that would unite their political party.